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Comments Concerning a Draft Programme of Action for International Women's Year

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September 13th, 1973

Comments concerning a draft programme
of action for International Women's Year

submitted by the World Young Women's Christian Association

1. Purpose of the Year

We share with many others the feeling that the name International Women's Year would not have been our choice. Because the wording can be misleading, it is most important that the purpose of the Year be made quite clear. What is at stake is not women as such, but the possibility for women to find their place in society, so that, alongside with men, they fully participate in the shaping of the local, national and world community in all its different aspects. It is therefore hoped that the Year will not be considered as a "women's affair", but will become a Human Rights concern for the whole society, men and women together.

2. Promotion of equality between men and women

- a) One of the main aspects to be highlighted is the gap between the law, which in many places recognises equal rights to men and women, in particular in the political field, and the reality, as women face it in their everyday life, because of sociological, cultural and psychological reasons.
- b) - About equal pay for work of equal value, it is not enough that governments ratify ILO Convention N° 100, they must really implement it. This implies a re-evaluation of the various types of work. For instance, as it happens in many places, why should work demanding physical strength be more valued, and therefore be better paid, than work demanding manual skilfulness ?
- Another aspect of the problem to be looked at is the downgrading of professions when mainly carried on by women.
- The impact of technological advance on women's work should also be carefully considered (e.g. when new and expensive machines are introduced, the job is usually given to men, etc.).

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3. Integration of women in development

The word "integration" may be misleading. "Participation" should be added. The aim is that women take full part in the community life, i.e. also in shaping the community, and not that they "integrate" in, and adjust to the established patterns. In this respect, what does the International Development Strategy mean when speaking of the "full participation of youth" and "full integration of women" (art.18)? Taking place at the mid point of the Decade, the International Women's Year must be used as a constant reminder of the crucial importance of women's contribution to development.

4. Strengthening of world peace

This third objective of the Year is very important, as it underlines the responsibility women must bear together with men with regard to peace and its various aspects (disarmament, justice, international understanding and co-operation, etc.). This implies that women be also actively concerned with and involved in economic and political problems, and that they take part in all national and international decision-making bodies.

5. Population

As the International Women's Year will immediately follow the International Population Year, and as by 1975 people will hopefully be sensitised to the problem of population, it might be useful to include the question of population more expressly in the Programme for action, and particularly to mention the link between Population and Women, and the need for women's full participation in national and international population policies and programmes.

6. Women in a male dominated society

That the structures of society are made by and for men is a reality all around the world; actually, it is the reason why an International Women's Year is needed. But in our view, not enough attention has been given to the problems - practical, psychological, cultural, sociological, economic, etc. - that women face when trying to find their way into the economic and political structures of the male dominated society in order to share with men in the shaping of community life - locally, nationally and internationally.

We hope that among the many actions which will be carried on in the framework of the International Women's Year, some study will be made, hopefully in different parts of the world, on that particular question (What are the real difficulties women face when trying to participate in the male dominated society ? What are the deep causes ? What could be done ? etc.).

7. Suggestions for Programme at national level (Annex II, pp.2-5)

- Special Act of Commemoration

This can be very useful, at the condition that it does not remain words however kind and gracious, but without any real commitment and follow up. Acts of commemoration should be accompanied by practical and really meaningful decisions.

- Publicity measures

The dangers should be avoided : Make the International Women's Year and women ridiculous, and make everybody fed up with them. It is certainly not easy to avoid these dangers.

- Publicity and educational measures

More thought and effort should be given, both at the national and the international level, to the presentation and interpretation of the existing legislation in favour of women. It is certainly difficult, but essential that women hear of their rights stated in bills, conventions and declarations in such a way that each woman can see what all that means for her, in her own family, job and community. General words must be made relevant for everyday life.

- The establishment of national commissions or similar bodies

Such commissions can be very useful. Only, it is important that they do not become "women's commissions", but include a good proportion of men and are given the same consideration as any other national commission.